LITTLE HOUSE

The Laura Years

A LITTLE HOUSE CHAPTER BOOK

Little House Farm Days

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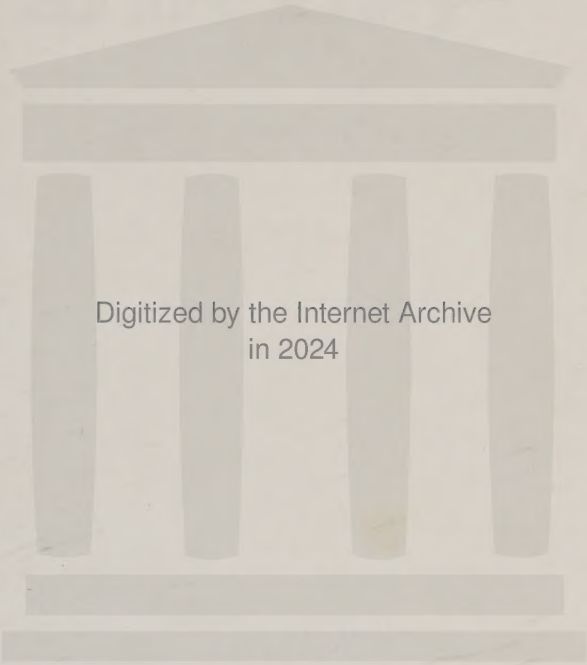

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Little House Farm Days

THE LITTLE HOUSE CHAPTER BOOKS

Adapted from the Little House books by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Illustrated by Renée Graef

THE ADVENTURES OF LAURA & JACK

PIONEER SISTERS

ANIMAL ADVENTURES

SCHOOL DAYS

LAURA & NELLIE

FARMER BOY DAYS

LITTLE HOUSE FARM DAYS

HARD TIMES ON THE PRAIRIE

LITTLE HOUSE FRIENDS

CHRISTMAS STORIES

LAURA INGALLS WILDER

illustrated by
RENÉE GRAEF

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CHAPTER 1

Harvesting Time

The wheat was ripe in Pa's fields near the little house where Laura lived with her Ma and Pa and her sisters, Mary and Carrie. It was harvest time in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. That was a busy time for Pa and Ma. But then Laura couldn't think of any time of year that wasn't busy. Running a farm, even a little one, was a lot of work.

Right now it was time to gather nuts from the hickory trees and the hazelnut bushes. The garden vegetables must be picked and stored away. Laura and her

big sister, Mary, helped pull up the long yellow carrots and the round, purple-topped turnips. They helped Pa dig up the potatoes, and they helped Ma cook pumpkin for pumpkin pies.

When the grain got ripe in the fields, Uncle Henry came to cut their tall wheat stalks. Laura loved those days, because she got to see her cousins and her aunt Polly. Ma and Aunt Polly worked in the house, and all the cousins played together in the yard till dinnertime.

After the oats were cut, Ma took several bundles of them and put them in a tub of water to soften them. Then she braided the straws into long ropes. When all the straws were braided, she sewed the braids around and around to make hats for the whole family. Laura liked to watch Ma. She learned how to braid the straw, and

she made a little hat for her doll, Charlotte.

One frosty morning, four horses came up the road, pulling a machine. Two men rode on top of it.

The horses pulled the machine into the field where Pa and Uncle Henry and Grandpa had stacked their wheat. Two more men came, with another machine. This one was smaller.

Pa called out to Ma. The threshers had come!

The men had come to thresh the wheat. Threshing was separating the grains of wheat, which could be ground into flour for baking, from the straw. Always before, Pa had done all the threshing by hand, and it was long, slow work. But today the threshers were bringing a machine to help.

Pa hurried out to the field with his

horses. Ma said Laura and Mary could go, too, if they were careful not to get in the way.

Uncle Henry came riding up. He tied his horse to a tree. Then he and Pa hitched all the other horses to the smaller machine. They hitched each pair of horses to the end of a long stick that came out from the center of the machine. A long iron rod lay on the ground, from the small machine to the big one.

Later Pa told Laura and Mary that the big machine was called the separator. The long iron rod was called the tumbling rod. The little machine was called the horsepower. Eight horses were hitched to it to make it go, so this was an eight-horsepower machine.

A man sat on top of the horsepower. When everything was ready, he clucked to

the horses. They started to walk in a circle, around and around. Each team pulled on the long stick to which it was hitched. Their pulling made the tumbling rod roll over and over on the ground.

The tumbling rod moved the gears of the separator. The separator stood beside the stack of wheat.

All of this turning and tumbling made a huge noise. It was a racket of banging and clanging. Laura and Mary held tight to each other's hands. They had never seen such a machine before. They had never heard such a racket.

Pa and Uncle Henry climbed on top of the wheat stack. They tossed bundles of wheat down onto a board. A man stood at the board and cut the bands on the bundles. One by one he shoved the bundles into a hole at the end of the separator.

The hole looked like the separator's mouth. It had long iron teeth. The teeth were chewing. They chewed the bundles, and the separator swallowed them. Straw blew out at the separator's other end. And out of a hole in its side poured hundreds of grains of wheat.

Two men were trampling the straw and shaping it into a stack. One man was putting the grain into sacks.

All the men were working as fast as they possibly could. The machine kept right up with them. Laura and Mary were so excited, they could hardly breathe. The horses walked around and around, and the golden straw blew out in a golden cloud. The wheat streamed golden-brown out of the spout. Pa and Uncle Henry kept pitching the bundles down.

Laura and Mary watched as long as

they could. Then they ran back to the house to help Ma get dinner for all those men.

The men stopped at noon to gobble down the big dinner Ma had made. They were very hungry from the hard work. Then they went back to the machines in the fields, to finish the threshing.

By the middle of the afternoon, all the threshing was done. The men who owned the machines drove them away. They took along some sacks of wheat as their pay. They were going to the next place where neighbors wanted their wheat threshed by the machines.

Pa was very tired that night. But he was happy.

"It would have taken Henry and Peterson and Pa and me a couple of weeks apiece to thresh as much grain with flails

as that machine threshed today," he told Ma. "We wouldn't have got as much wheat, either, and it wouldn't have been as clean. That machine's a great invention!"

His eyes shone as he talked. "Other folks can stick to old-fashioned ways if they want to, but I'm all for progress. It's a great age we're living in. As long as I raise wheat, I'm going to have a machine come thresh it, if there's one anywhere in the neighborhood."

Laura was proud of Pa. He was the one who got the other men to stack their wheat together and send for the threshing machine. It was a wonderful machine. Everybody was glad it had come.

CHAPTER 2

Helping Pa

Pa was always cheerful and busy. Laura liked to follow him around the farm, watching him at his work.

Every season of the year there were different things Pa had to do. Some days he was busy cutting down trees. Other days he plowed or planted or harvested, depending on the time of year. Every day he had to milk the cows and feed all the animals.

And in autumn, after the grain had been stored in the barn and when the frost crawled up the windowpanes at night, he

smoked deer meat. Smoking the meat saved it so that it would not spoil. Pa smoked the meat so that Laura and Mary and Ma and Baby Carrie would have food to eat in the winter.

After he went hunting, Pa would bring home a deer and skin it carefully. He sprinkled the skins all over with salt and stretched them out to dry. He would make soft leather out of them, later on.

He cut up the meat, and he salted it. Then he laid each piece on a board. He let the meat soak up the salt for a few days, and after that it was time to smoke it.

Out in the yard was a tall, hollow log that Pa had cut from the trunk of a hollow tree. Pa drove nails inside the log as far as he could reach from each end. Then he stood it up and made a little roof for the top. Laura watched him do this.

He cut a little door on one side of the log near the bottom. He put leather hinges on the piece he had cut out, and he fitted that piece back into place. Now the little door could be opened and closed.

Pa took up the salted meat. He cut a hole near the end of each piece. Through the hole he threaded a string. Laura watched him hang the meat on the nails in the hollow log. He reached up through the little door and hung meat on the low nails. He climbed on a ladder and lifted off the roof so he could hang meat from the high nails.

Then he put the roof back on again and climbed down the ladder.

"Run over to the chopping block," he told Laura. "Fetch me some of those green hickory chips—new, clean, white ones."

Laura ran to the block where Pa

chopped wood. She filled her apron with the fresh, sweet-smelling chips.

Just inside the little door in the hollow log, Pa built a fire. He used tiny bits of bark and moss. Then he took some of the green hickory chips and laid them on the fire.

The green chips were new and moist, so they did not burn quickly. They smoldered and filled the hollow log with thick smoke.

Pa shut the door. A little smoke squeezed through the crack around the door. A little smoke came out through the roof. But most of the smoke was shut in with the meat.

"There's nothing better than good hickory smoke," Pa said. "That will make good venison that will keep anywhere, in any weather."

For the next few days Laura and Ma watched the fire in the hollow log. When smoke stopped coming through the cracks, Laura brought more hickory chips. Ma put them on the fire under the meat. When the door was opened, a thick, smoky, meaty smell came out.

At last Pa said the venison had smoked long enough. They let the fire go out, and Pa took all the pieces of meat out of the hollow tree. Ma wrapped each piece

neatly in paper and hung the pieces in the attic. The meat would keep safe and dry there. All winter long Ma could use it to make her good stew. Every bite tasted like hickory smoke and a fresh winter day.

Pa used a long rifle for hunting. On winter nights he made bullets for his next day's hunting. Laura and Mary helped him. They brought him the big spoon with the long handle, and the box full of bits of lead, and the bullet mold. They watched him melt the bits of lead over the fire, using the big spoon.

When it was melted, he poured the lead into a little hole in the bullet mold. He waited a minute, and then he opened the mold. Out dropped a bright new bullet onto the hearth.

The bullet was too hot to touch. But it shone so prettily that sometimes Laura

couldn't help touching it. Then she burned her fingers, but she never said anything. It was her own fault. Pa had told her never to touch a new bullet. So she popped her fingers into her mouth to cool them, and watched Pa make more bullets.

When he stopped, there would be a shining pile of bullets on the hearth. Pa let them cool. He took his jackknife and trimmed off the little lumps left by the hole in the mold. He gathered up the tiny shavings of lead and saved them carefully. He could melt them again the next time he made bullets.

He put the finished bullets into the bullet pouch Ma had made for him. It was a little bag of buckskin, from a buck Pa had shot.

Now it was time to clean the gun. The inside of the barrel was sure to be dirty

from powder smoke. Pa must always keep it clean and dry.

He poured boiling water down into the gun barrel. He used the long, skinny ramrod to push a piece of clean cloth down into the barrel. Up and down, up and down went the ramrod. Hot water spurted out the hole of the gun. The water was black with powder smoke. Pa went on pouring and cleaning until the water ran clear. Then the gun was clean.

Then Pa greased the barrel, inside and out. He polished the wooden handle until it shone. Now it was time to load the gun again, and Laura and Mary must help him.

"You watch me now," Pa said, "and tell me if I make a mistake."

They watched very carefully, but Pa never made a mistake.

CHAPTER 3

Helping Ma

Just like Pa, Ma was busy all the time. Her hands were quick and steady, and everything she did came out just right. Her smile was like stars shining.

Every day, after the beds were made and the breakfast dishes washed, Ma did the chore that belonged to that day, and Laura and Mary helped. On Mondays Ma got out the big washtub and filled it with hot water. She washed all the clothes by hand and hung them to dry. Tuesday was ironing day, and on Wednesday Ma did the mending.

On Thursday Ma churned butter. She churned for a long time. Mary sometimes churned while Ma rested, but the dash was too heavy for Laura. Every Friday she cleaned the little house from top to bottom, and Saturday was for baking. Once Laura made a pie in her patty-pan with a little piece of dough. Sunday was a day of rest. Laura liked the churning and baking days best of all the week.

All year round there were special jobs that needed doing. Autumn was harvest time, and early winter was butchering time. Then Ma was busy for days, making sausage and headcheese, and cooking hog fat into lard. In spring there was the vegetable garden to plant and tend.

In summer, berries must be picked and made into the year's jam. The warm weather meant more visitors, and so Ma

had to cook extra food. And when the grass was tall and thick in the woods and the cows were giving plenty of milk, that was the time to make cheese.

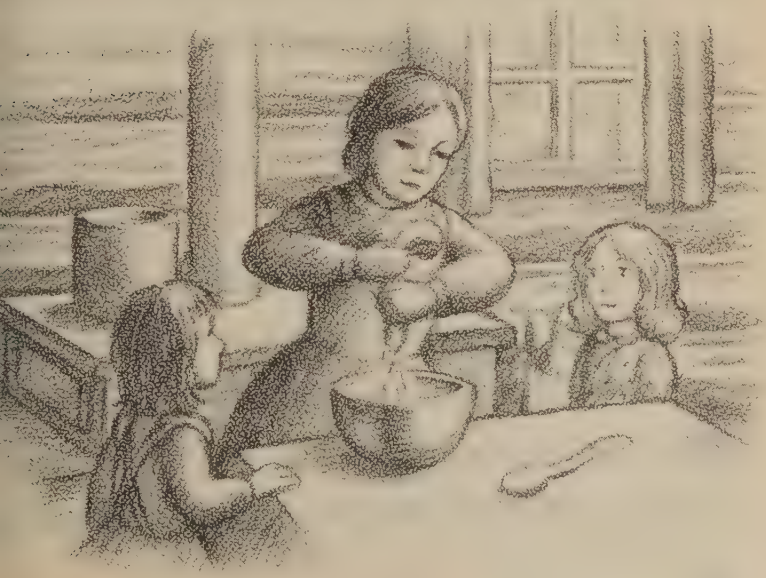
One summer day, Pa went to Uncle Henry's and came back with a piece of calf's stomach. It had a lining called rennet, which was used to make cheese. It was like a piece of soft gray leather. One side was ridged and rough. Ma tied a bit of the rennet in a cloth and put it to soak in warm water.

When the cows were milked at night, Ma set the milk away in pans. In the morning she skimmed off the cream. She would churn that into butter later on.

The next morning, the cows were milked again. Ma mixed that milk with yesterday's skimmed milk. She set it all on the stove to heat.

When the milk was heated enough, Ma squeezed every drop of water out of the rennet in the cloth. She poured that water into the hot milk. She stirred it well and left it in a warm place by the stove.

In a little while, the milk thickened. It became a smooth, quivery mass. Ma took a long knife and cut the mass into little squares. She let them stand while the curd separated from the whey.



Then she poured it all into a cloth. The thin, yellowish whey drained out. When the whey was all drained, Ma emptied the curd into a big pan. She salted it and stirred it well.

Laura and Mary were always there, helping all they could. They loved to eat bits of the curd when Ma was salting it. It squeaked in their teeth.

Pa had put up a cheese board outside the back door. It was a long, flat board with two grooves cut lengthwise in it. It rested on two blocks, with one end a little higher than the other. Under the lower end stood an empty pail.

Ma put her wooden cheese hoop on the board. She spread a clean, wet cloth all over the inside of it. Then she filled the hoop heaping full of salted curd.

She covered the heap with another

lean, wet cloth. She took a round board, ut small enough to go inside the cheese oop, and put that on top of the cloth. Then she lifted a heavy rock on top of the oard.

All day long the round board settled lowly under the weight of the rock. Whey ressed out and ran down the grooves of he long board under the hoop. The whey an off the board into the pail.

The next morning, Ma lifted off the eavy rock and the round board. She took ut the round, pale-yellow cheese. It was s big as a milk pan. She trimmed it mooth and sewed a cloth tightly around t. She rubbed the cloth all over with fresh utter. Then she put the cheese on a shelf n the pantry.

Every morning she made more curd nd filled the cheese hoop again. Every

morning there was a new cheese to take out of the hoop. Every day she wiped every cheese with a wet cloth and rubbed it all over with more fresh butter.

After a great many days, the cheese was ripe. There was a hard rind all over it. Then Ma wrapped each cheese in paper. She laid it away on a high shelf to save until they were ready to eat it.

Laura and Mary liked cheese making. They especially liked to eat the edges Ma trimmed off the big yellow cheeses. Ma laughed at them for eating green cheese.

"The moon is made of green cheese, some people say," she told them.

The new cheese did look like the round moon when it came up behind the trees. But it wasn't green. It was yellow, like the moon.

"It's called green cheese," Ma said,

'because it isn't ripened yet. When it's cured and ripened, it won't be a green cheese."

"Is the moon really made of green cheese?" Laura asked.

Ma laughed again. "I think people say that because it looks like a green cheese," she said. "But appearances are deceiving."

Then while she rubbed all the green cheeses with butter, she told Laura and Mary about the dead, cold moon that is like a little world on which nothing grows.

The first day Ma made cheese, Laura tasted the whey. She tasted it without saying anything to Ma. When Ma turned around and saw Laura's face, she laughed. That night Ma told Pa that Laura had tasted the whey and didn't like it.

"You wouldn't starve to death on Ma's

whey, like old Grimes did on his wife's," Pa said.

He got out his fiddle and played a song for them:

"Old Grimes is dead, that good old man,
We ne'er shall see him more,
He used to wear an old gray coat,
All buttoned down before.

"Old Grimes' wife made skim-milk cheese,
Old Grimes, he drank the whey,
There came an east wind from the west,
And blew Old Grimes away."

"There you have it!" said Pa. "Old Grimes' wife was a mean, tight-fisted

woman. If she hadn't skimmed all the milk, a little cream would have run off in the whey, and Old Grimes might have staggered along.

"But she skimmed off every bit of cream, and poor Old Grimes got so thin, the wind blew him away. Plumb starved to death."

He looked at Ma. "Nobody'd starve to death when you were around, Caroline," he said.

Laura agreed with Pa.

CHAPTER 4

Building a House

After a while the Big Woods began to fill up with people. They cut down trees to build houses and plant gardens. When the trees were gone, the animals began to leave also. Pa had to walk farther and farther to hunt for a deer or a rabbit for Ma to cook.

At last Pa decided it was time to move. He wanted to live where there were not so many people. He liked a country where the wild animals lived without being afraid. He liked to see the little fawns and their mothers looking at him from the

woods. He liked to watch the fat, lazy bears eating berries in the wild berry patches.

Pa told Ma and Laura and Mary about a place called Kansas, way out west. Instead of woods, Kansas had a big prairie. There were miles and miles of wide-open fields just waiting for someone to come and plant them with grain.

Laura could hardly believe they were going to travel such a long way. Pa and Ma packed everything they owned and loaded it into a covered wagon. They said good-bye to their family and friends in the Big Woods and began the journey west.

For weeks, Pa's horses pulled the wagon through woods, over rivers, and across the wide prairie. At long last they came to a spot that Pa said would be their new home.

The first thing they had to do was to build a house. Pa showed them the spot where it would be. The spot was out in the middle of the prairie, far away from any town. Laura and Mary looked in every direction. All around them there was nothing but grassy prairie spreading to the edge of the sky.

To the north they could see a line of dark-green treetops. Pa said there was a creek there. Out on this prairie, trees could only grow near water. Far away to the east was another broken line of green, and Pa said that was the Verdigris River.

Pa and Ma unloaded everything from the wagon and piled it on the grass. When the wagon was empty, Pa took his ax and drove the wagon away. He drove right down into the prairie, out of sight.

"Where's Pa going?" Laura asked.

"He's going to get a load of logs from the creek bottoms," said Ma.

It was strange and a little scary to be left without the wagon on the high prairie. The land and the sky seemed too large. Laura felt small. She wanted to hide in the tall grass like a little prairie chicken.

But she didn't. She helped Ma, while Mary sat on the grass and minded Baby Carrie. Laura and Ma made up beds and cleared a space for the fire. They couldn't start the fire until Pa brought wood.

For days Pa hauled logs from the creek bottoms to where Ma and the girls were. He made two piles of logs, one for the house and one for the stable. The wagon wheels began to carve a road in the grass where Pa drove back and forth. At night the horses, Pet and Patty, ate the grass near the log piles until it was short and stubby.

Pa began to build the house first. He marked off the size of it on the ground. With his spade he dug a shallow little hollow along two sides of that space.

Into these hollows he rolled two of the biggest logs. They were sound, strong logs, because they must hold up the house. They were called sills.

Then Pa chose two more strong, big logs, and he rolled these logs onto the ends of the sills. Now he had a big empty square on the ground. With his ax he cut a deep notch near each end of the two new logs. He cut the notches so they would fit around half of the sill when he rolled the new logs over.

That finished the foundation of the house. It was one log high.

The sills were half buried in the ground. The logs on their ends fitted snugly to

the ground. At the corners, where they crossed, the notches let them fit together so that they were no thicker than one log.

The next day Pa began the walls. From each side he rolled up a log. He notched its ends so that it fitted down over the end logs. Then he rolled up logs from the ends, and notched them so they fitted down over the side logs.

Now the whole house was two logs high.

The logs fitted solidly together at the corners. But no log is ever perfectly straight, and all logs are bigger at one end than at the other end. This meant there were cracks between the logs all along the walls. Pa would chink those cracks later.

All by himself, Pa built the house three logs high. Then Ma helped him. Pa lifted

one end of a log onto the wall, and Ma held it while he lifted the other end.

Pa stood up on the wall to cut the notches. Ma helped roll and hold the log while he settled it into the notch.

Log by log they built the walls higher. Soon they were so high, Laura couldn't climb over them anymore.

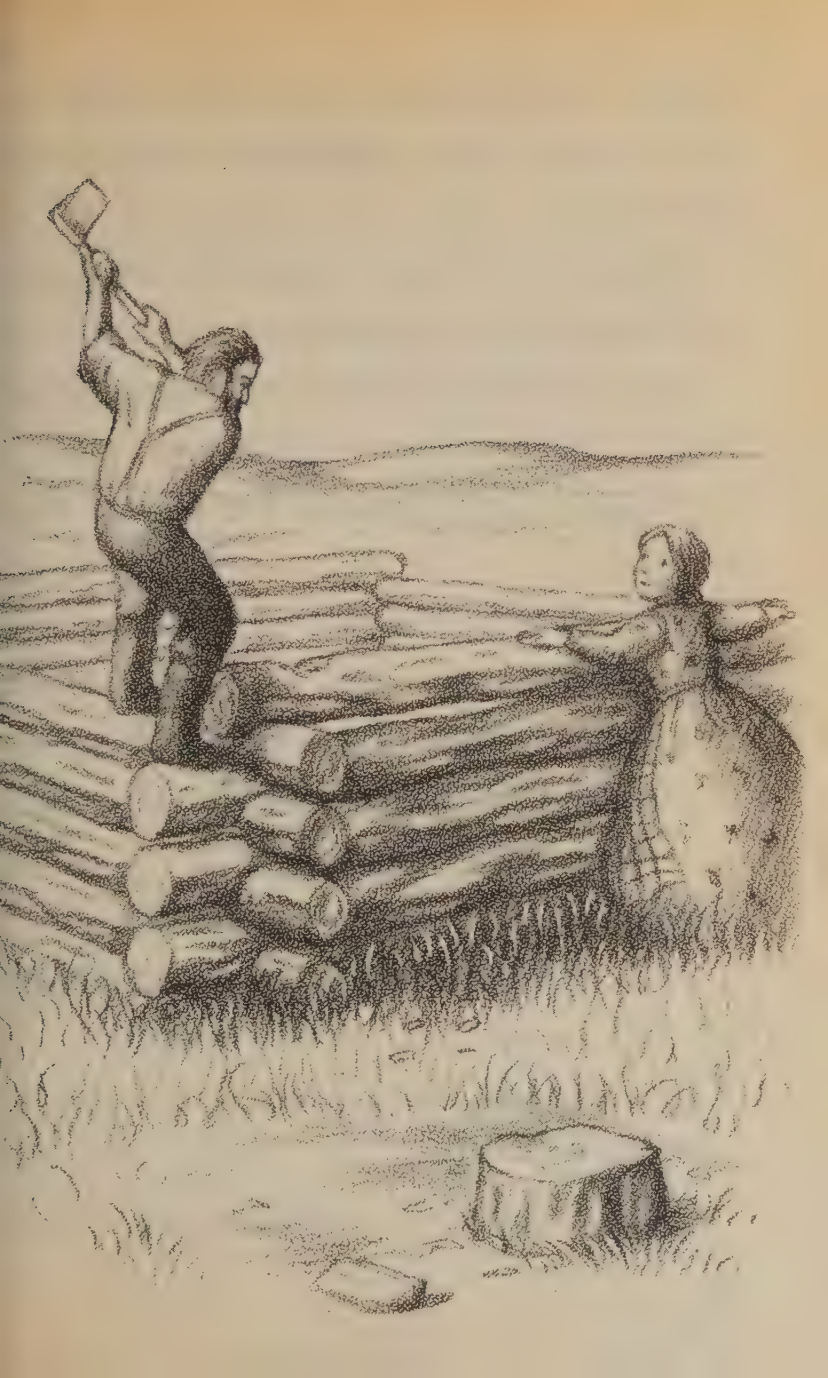
She was tired of watching Pa and Ma build the house. She decided to go exploring in the tall grass. Suddenly she heard Pa shout.

"Let go!" he yelled. "Get out from under!"

The big, heavy log was sliding. Pa was trying to hold up his end of it, to keep it from falling on Ma.

He couldn't. It crashed down. Laura saw Ma lying on the ground.

But right away, Ma gasped, "I'm all



right." The log was on her foot. Pa lifted the log, and Ma pulled her foot from under it.

"Move your arms," he said. "Is your back hurt? Can you turn your head?"

Ma moved her arms and turned her head.

"Thank God," Pa said. He helped Ma to sit up.

"I'm all right, Charles," she said again. "It's just my foot."

Quickly Pa took off her shoe and stocking. He felt her foot all over, moving the ankle and every toe.

"Does it hurt much?" he asked.

Ma's mouth was a tight line. "Not much," she said.

Pa said, "No bones broken. It's only a bad sprain."

"Well," said Ma, and her voice was

cheerful, "a sprain's soon mended. Don't be so upset, Charles."

Pa helped Ma to the tent. He built up the fire and heated water for Ma to soak her foot in. The foot was swollen and her ankle was turning purple. When Ma took it out of the water, it was too puffed up to fit in her shoe. She wrapped it tightly with strips of rag.

She could walk on it if she went very slowly. She made supper as usual, but it took a long time. Pa said she could not help to build the house until her ankle was well.

But everyone was thankful that the foot was not broken. A little hollow in the ground had saved it.

CHAPTER 5

Mr. Edwards

Ma's ankle took a while to heal. When she unwrapped it in the evenings it was purple and black and green and yellow. The house would have to wait.

Then one afternoon Pa came whistling up the creek road. Ma was surprised. She had not expected Pa back from hunting so soon.

"Good news!" he shouted.

He had met a neighbor. A man named Mr. Edwards lived just two miles away, on the other side of the creek. Pa and Mr. Edwards were going to trade work—just

ke Pa used to trade work with Uncle enry back in the Big Woods. It was much asier to get the big jobs done when there ere two people working.

Mr. Edwards wasn't married. "He says e can get along without a house better nan you and the girls can," Pa told Ma. So he's going to help me first. Then as oon as he gets his logs ready, I'll go over nd help him."

They wouldn't have to wait any longer or the house. Ma's foot could take its time o heal.

"How do you like that, Caroline?" Pa aid joyfully.

"That's good, Charles," said Ma. "I'm lad."

Early next morning Mr. Edwards came. He was lean and tall and brown. He owed to Ma and called her "Ma'am." But

he told Laura that he was a wildcat fro
Tennessee.

He wore tall boots and ragged overal
and a coonskin cap. He could spit tobac
juice farther than Laura had ever imag
ined anyone could spit. He could hit an
thing he spat at, too. Laura tried and trie
but she could not spit so far or so well a
Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Edwards was a fast worker. In on
day he and Pa built those walls as high a

wanted them. They joked and sang
ile they worked, and their axes made
e chips fly.

On top of the walls they set up a frame
the roof. Then they cut a tall hole in
e south wall of the house. That would
the door. In the west wall and east wall
ey cut square holes for windows.

The house was beginning to look like a
use. Laura couldn't wait to see inside.
soon as the door hole was cut, she ran
rough it.

Everything was striped inside. Stripes
sunshine came through the cracks in
e west wall. Through the cracks between
e logs she could see stripes of prairie.
ne sweet smell of prairie mixed with the
eet smell of cut wood.

Around the door hole and the window
les, Pa and Mr. Edwards nailed thin

slabs against the cut ends of the logs. A
the house was finished, all but the roof.

Mr. Edwards stayed for supper. The
was stewed jackrabbit with white-flo
dumplings and plenty of gravy. There w
steaming-hot corn bread flavored wi
bacon fat. There was even molasses to e
on the corn bread.

Mr. Edwards said he surely did appr
ciate that supper.

Then Pa brought out his fiddle. T
first thing he played was Laura and Mar
favorite song. Laura liked it best of
because Pa's voice went down deep, dee
deeper when he sang that song.

"Oh, I am a Gypsy King!
I come and go as I please!
I pull my old nightcap down,
And take the world at my ease."

Then his voice went down deep, leeper than the very oldest bullfrog's.

"Oh, I am a Gyp sy KING!"

They all laughed. Laura could hardly top laughing.

"Oh, sing it again, Pa!" she cried.

Pa played and played, and everything began to dance. Mr. Edwards jumped up and danced like a jumping jack in the moonlight. Laura and Mary clapped their hands and tapped their feet, and Pa's fiddle sang and bounced.

Even the firelight danced, and all around its edge the shadows were dancing. Only the new house stood still and quiet in the dark, as the big moon

rose and shone on its walls.

The next morning, Pa said that now that the walls were up, it was time to move in.

"We'll have to get along as best we can without a floor or other fixings," he told Ma. "I must build the stable as fast as I can, so Pet and Patty can be inside walls too. Last night I could hear wolves howling from every direction, seemed like, and close, too."

So they ate breakfast quickly and hurried to carry all the wood chips out of the house. Laura and Mary ran back and forth as fast as they could, filling their skirts full of chips. They made a pile of them on the ground. Then they helped Ma carry things into the house, while Pa stretched the canvas wagon top over the house like a roof.

By dinnertime the house was in order. The beds were neatly made on the floor.

The wagon seat and two ends of logs were brought in for chairs. Boxes and bundles were neat against the walls. It was a pleasant house.

Pa said he would make a solid roof before winter came. He would lay a wooden floor, and make beds and tables and chairs. He would build a fireplace and a chimney, and a stable for Pet and Patty. He would dig a well, so that Ma could get fresh water without walking all the way to the creek. And one day there would even be real glass in the windows.

It was going to be a very busy summer. Building a farm from scratch was just as much work as keeping one going all year round.

CHAPTER 6

Planting a Garden

It took the rest of the summer and all winter to settle into the new prairie house. The winter was cold and lonely. Mary and Laura stayed inside helping Ma with the work and sewing quilt patches.

Then one morning the whole land was green.

"When did that grass grow?" Ma asked in amazement. "I thought the whole country was bare, and now there's nothing but green grass as far as the eye can see."

The whole sky was filled with lines of wild ducks and wild geese flying north.

Crows cawed above the trees along the creek. The winds whispered in the new grass, bringing the smell of the earth and growing things.

Now in the daytime everyone was busy. Pa hurried with his plowing, and Mary and Laura helped Ma plant the garden seeds. With the hoe, Ma dug small holes in the ground, and Laura and Mary carefully dropped in the seeds. Then Ma

covered them snugly with earth. They planted onions and carrots and peas and beans and turnips.

They were all so happy because spring had come, and soon they would have vegetables to eat. They were growing very tired of just bread and meat.

One evening Pa came from the field and helped Ma set out the cabbage plants and the sweet-potato plants. Earlier Ma had sowed the cabbage seeds in a flat box and kept it in the house. She watered it carefully. Every day she carried it from the morning sunshine to the afternoon sunshine that came through the windows. She also had planted a sweet potato in another box. The cabbage seeds were now little gray-green plants. The sweet potato had sent up a stem and green leaves from each of its eyes.

Now Pa and Ma took the tiny plants outside and settled their roots comfortably in the ground. They watered the roots and pressed earth on them firmly. It was dark before the last plant was in its place, and Pa and Ma were tired. But they were glad, too, because soon they'd have cabbages and sweet potatoes.

Every day Laura looked at that garden. Little crumpled leaves of peas came up, and tiny spears of onions. The little yellow bean stems, coiled like springs, popped up. Pretty soon they would all begin to live like kings.

Every morning Pa went cheerfully whistling to the field. He carried a sack of corn fastened to his belt. As he plowed, he threw grains of corn into the ditch beside the plow's point. The plow turned over a strip of soil on top of the seed corn. The

corn would fight its way up through the earth, and there would be a corn field.

Then there would be green corn for dinner someday. And next winter there would be ripe corn for Pet and Patty to eat.

It was the best garden yet.

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CHAPTER 7

Starting Over

Part of being a farmer was that sometimes good things happened to the farm, and sometimes bad things happened. After only a year in their new prairie farm, Laura and her family had to move again. This time they went north to Minnesota. "Never mind!" Pa told them. "We'll make a better garden."

Laura heard Pa say they were leaving, but she did not believe it until she saw Mr. Scott, their neighbor, leading away their cow. Then she knew it was really true; they really were leaving their little prairie farm.

This time they moved to a farm that had a small field of wheat, already ripe. Pa would have to harvest that wheat right away. And next spring he could plant a bigger wheat field. When he sold that wheat, he would have enough money to build a new house.

So until then they would live in a dugout—a funny little house dug into the side of a hill. It had dirt walls and a dirt floor. Grass grew on top of the roof. If Laura walked outside the house and up a little path, she could stand right on the roof.

Mary and Laura helped Ma clean out the dugout. They swept the walls and the floor with a willow-twig broom. There was a bubbling creek nearby, where they fetched water. Then they helped Ma bring everything that they could carry down from the wagon.

The dugout was a cozy place. Even Ma said she liked it. But she didn't like to put the beds right on the dirt floor.

"I don't like to sleep on the floor in a house," she said.

"Well, that's soon fixed," said Pa. "For tonight, I'll cut some boughs from the willow trees to spread the beds on. Tomorrow I'll find some straight willow poles and make a couple of bedsteads."

He took his ax and went whistling up the path. Laura ran at his heels.

"Let me help, Pa!" she panted. "I can carry some."

"Why, so you can," said Pa. His eyes twinkled down at her. "There's nothing like help when a man has a big job to do."

Pa often said he did not know how he could manage without Laura. She helped him carry the leafy willow boughs

and spread them in the dugout. Then she went with him to the stable.

Laura wished their beautiful horses, Pet and Patty, were in the stable. But Pa had traded Pet and Patty to the man who sold him the farm. He had traded the horses for two big oxen.

"Pet and Patty like to travel," Pa had

told Laura. "Plowing is too hard for them. They will be much happier, traveling out west. You wouldn't want to keep them here, breaking their hearts on a plow. Pet and Patty will go on traveling. With those big oxen I can break up a great big field and have it ready for wheat next spring."

Laura remembered those words as she stared at the two big oxen in their stalls. One was huge and gray with short horns and gentle eyes. The other was smaller, with long horns and wild eyes. He was bright red-brown all over, and his name was Bright. The big gray ox was called Pete.

Laura looked at their clumsy legs and their big, slimy noses.

"Oh, Pa," she said. Her voice trembled. "I don't think I like cattle—much."

Pa took her hand in his big one.

"We must do the best we can, Laura, and not grumble," he said gently. "What must be done is best done cheerfully. And someday we will have horses again."

"When, Pa?" Laura asked.

"When we raise our first crop of wheat," Pa said.

CHAPTER 8

Milking Time

Laura didn't stop missing Pet and Patty. But after a while she came to like the big, sturdy oxen. She liked to watch them run up onto the prairie to join the other neighborhood cattle for grazing. A neighbor boy named Johnny Johnson took care of them while they roamed on the prairie.

Whenever Pa didn't need Pete and Bright in the fields, he drove them to a spot on the prairie near a big gray rock. Johnny Johnson led the herd right past the rock, and Pete and Bright joined the other

cattle. In the evenings, Johnny led the herd past again, and Pa got his oxen and led them home.

One evening Pa took Laura and Mary to the gray rock to watch the herd go by.

"Here they come!" Pa said. "Scramble up!" He boosted them onto the rock.

The cattle raced by. Laura saw a blur of red backs and brown backs, black and white and spotted backs. Heads tipped to show long, fierce horns. Laura was glad to be safe on the high rock, watching.

The last of the herd was passing when Laura and Mary caught sight of the prettiest cow they had ever seen.

She was small and white, with red ears. In the middle of her forehead there was a red spot. Her small white horns curved inward, pointing to that red spot. And on her white side, right in the middle, there was

a perfect circle of red spots as big as roses.

Even Mary jumped up and down.

"Oh, look! Oh, look!" Laura shouted. "Pa, see the cow with the wreath of roses!"

Pa laughed. And then a surprising thing happened. Pa helped Johnny Johnson drive that pretty cow away from the others.

"Come along, girls!" he called. "Help me drive her into the stable!"

Laura jumped off the rock. She ran to help him.

"Why, Pa why?" she shouted. "Oh, Pa, are we going to keep her?"

"She's our cow!" Pa grinned. The little white cow went into the stable.

Laura hurried to tell Ma.

"Come see the cow!" she cried. "Oh, Ma, the prettiest cow!"

"Charles!" said Ma, when she saw the little white cow in the stable.

"I got her from Nelson," Pa told her. Mr. Nelson had a farm nearby. "I'm paying him by day's work. Nelson's got to have help, haying and harvesting. Look at her. She's a good little cow. Caroline, we're going to have milk and butter again."

"Oh, Charles!" said Ma.

Laura did not wait to hear any more. She turned around and ran as fast as she could, straight for the supper table. She grabbed her tin cup and rushed back outside again.

Pa had tied the pretty white cow in her own little stall. The little cow stood quietly, chewing her cud. Laura squatted down beside her. She held the tin cup carefully in one hand. With the other hand she squeezed just as she had seen Pa do when he milked.

And sure enough, a stream of warm

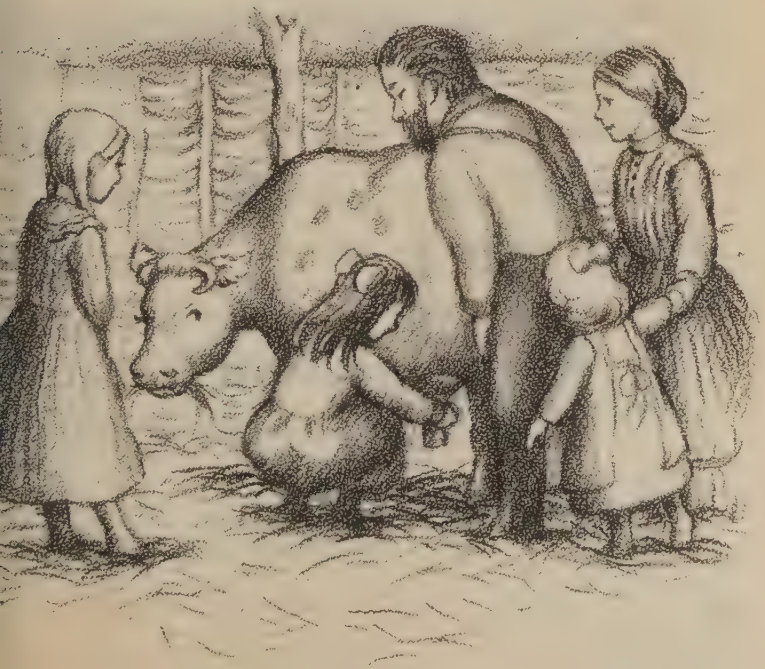
white milk went straight into the tin cup.

"My goodness! What is that child doing?" gasped Ma.

"I'm milking, Ma," said Laura.

"Not on that side," Ma told her quickly. "She'll kick you."

But the gentle cow only turned her head and looked at Laura with gentle eyes. She looked surprised, but she did not kick.



"Always milk a cow from the right side, Laura," said Ma.

Pa said, "Look at the little half-pint! Who taught you how to milk?"

Nobody had taught Laura. She knew how from watching Pa do it. Now everyone watched her—Ma and Pa and Mary and Carrie. Streak after streak of milk zinged into the tin cup. The white foam rose up almost to the cup's brim.

Pa and Ma and Mary and Laura each took a big swallow of that warm, delicious milk. Carrie drank up what was left. They all felt good inside. They stood staring at that beautiful cow and her circle of red spots.

"What is her name?" Mary asked.

"Well," said Ma, "we'll call her Spot."

CHAPTER 9

Moving In

Now Laura and Mary had an extra job to do. Each morning they had to drive Spot to the big gray rock. Johnny Johnson would come along with the other cattle, and Spot would join the herd. Pete and Bright did not graze with the herd now. Pa needed their help in the fields.

Pa was cutting the hay in his field. He stacked it into big heaps where it would keep for the winter. That hay would feed the oxen when the ground was frozen and covered with snow.

Then Pa plowed up the field where the hay had been. Pete and Bright pulled the heavy plow, with Pa steering behind them. The plow cut through the dirt and loosened it up. The field would be ready for wheat in the spring.

Winter passed, and the spring rains came. The creek flooded and then went back down. All at once the days were warm. It was time to plant the wheat.

Early every morning Pa went out to the field. He was at work before the sun came up, and he worked till dark.

"I declare," Ma said, "you're working that ground to death."

But Pa said the ground was dry because there had not been enough snow. He must plow deep and get the wheat sowed quickly. At night Pa was too tired to laugh or talk. He ate supper and went to bed.

At last the wheat was sowed. Then Pa planted oats for the cattle to eat over the winter. He dug a spot for the potato patch and the garden. Ma and Mary and Laura helped plant the potatoes. They sprinkled the little seeds in the garden rows.

The whole world was green with grass now. Yellow-green leaves uncurled on the willows. Violets and buttercups were thick in the prairie hollows. Only the wheat field was bare and brown.

One evening Pa showed Laura a faint green mist on that brown field. The wheat was up!

Each tiny sprout was so thin, Laura could hardly see it. But together they made that misty green color. Everyone was happy that night. It was going to be a good crop of wheat.

Now Pa could build the house. He went

to town and came back with a surprise. His wagon was full of smooth, straight boards. They had been sawed in a lumber mill. Only a machine could cut a board that straight and fine.

"Here's your new house, Caroline!" Pa sang out.

"But, Charles!" Ma gasped. She was speechless.

Laura ran and climbed up onto the wagon. She had never seen such smooth, beautiful boards.

"Are we going to have a house made of boards?" she asked.

"Yes, flutterbudget," said Pa. "And it's going to have glass windows!"

Once again, Pa built the house with his own two hands. Laura and Mary went out every day to watch him work until, finally, it was finished.

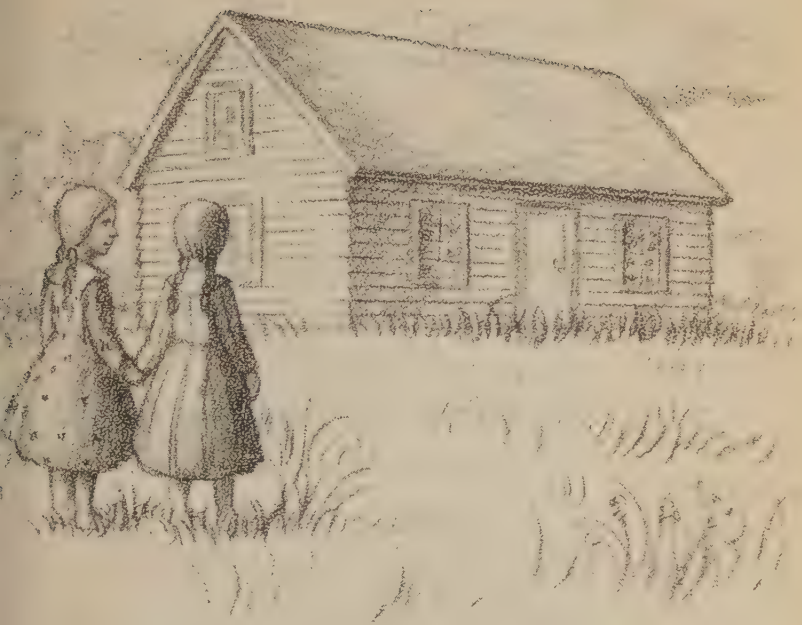
The house was one surprise after another. There was an upstairs and a downstairs. The downstairs was divided into two rooms. It was the first time in their lives that Laura and Mary would live in a house that was more than one big room.

Laura and Mary walked around the empty house, marveling at it. There was nothing more that a house could possibly have. The glass windows made the inside so light that you would hardly have known you were in a house. The yellow board walls and floor gave a clean smell to the rooms. The doorknobs were made of white china.

Laura knew there was a lot of hard work in that house. It was more than just the hours Pa had spent lifting boards and hammering them into place. It was more

than the care he had taken to lay the shingles perfectly together, so that not one drop of rain could leak through the roof. That house was every hour Pa had stooped over the plow in the wheat field. It was every potato Ma had planted in the garden, every seed Laura and Mary had sowed. Spot's good milk had gone into that house, for it made them all strong and helped them do their work. Pete and Bright had helped build that house, and so had Pet and Patty, who had brought the family here.

Laura and Mary took hands and walked outside. The wheat field made a silky green ripple over a curve of the prairie. Laura looked at the wonderful house. It gleamed in the sunlight, golden as the field of wheat that would soon grow and ripen, and be harvested.



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